

Holly Jolly Hurricane by PhantomPenguin

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Summary: Knowing full and well that Jim isn't the best when it comes to holidays, Joyce takes things into her own hands and brings Christmas to the cabin-complete with food, presents, and an army of children. Part holiday fic, part gratuitous Jopper fluff.

Holly Jolly Hurricane

First Stranger Things fic, whoop whoop! I've been reading from the sidelines for months, but now that I'm getting back into writing consistently I thought I'd take my turn in adding a small contribution to the collection. Comments and critiques are always encouraged, because I'm sure I'll keep writing for this fandom off and on. Cheers!

"What the hell is this?" A bleary Hopper and a bright-eyed Eleven peered through the crack in the cabin door, wearing contrasting expressions of groggy bemusement and childlike excitement. Hopper's hair was mussed, and the half-buttoned, untucked flannel hanging awkwardly from his torso made it quite evident that he had been pulled from his bed by the sound of their arrival.

"Merry Christmas to you too, you Grinch," Joyce said, shouldering through the door with a French toast casserole in hand and three bag-toting youths trailing behind her. She wore a hideous oversized green jumper and jeans tucked into heavy boots, and her hair was mussed in a manner that made it clear she had other priorities on her mind that morning. Smiling brightly at El, she carved a path across the floor to the small kitchen, depositing her load on the counter with a loud 'clunk' before turning to Hopper with a small smirk. "Since we know you so well," she began, scanning the room and its noticeable lack of decorations (a single string of lights across the wall and a small, lopped off pine tree slung over in the corner and surrounded by some interestingly wrapped presents) "we thought we would bring Christmas to *you*."

She knew they had made the right call as she watched El's face light up, the girl's serious expression melting away to a brilliant smile as she watched first Will, then Jonathan, then Nancy troop up the stairs carrying an array of boxes and parcels and bags. "Merry Christmas, El!" Will chirped, all smiles as he ran over to upend his armful by the tree. "Mike and Steve and the gang said they'd be by later after they do their presents and family stuff, too!"

"Hey now, what?" Hopper exclaimed, breaking the spell and turning to glare at him. "This is not some gathering place for every teenager

who just feels like stopping by!" He crossed his arms and glowered at the crowd already assembled in his home. Will stared up at him with wide, pleading eyes. Over in the corner, Jonathan and Nancy exchanged amused glances, and Joyce was snickering outright from her place at the counter.

Then Hopper made the mistake of locking eyes with El—the kid was all smiles, her head tilted as she leveled a bright, serious expression at him. "Christmas, please?" The look of hope and joy in her eyes was too much for Jim, and he finally huffed and turned to glare at the empty coffee pot. "Fine," he muttered, yanking out a container of ground coffee and scooping it sloppily into the appliance, keeping his hands active to give himself something to focus on. "Christmas."

At his acquiescence, chaos descended upon the small cabin.

The lopsided tree found its way into the center of the room, eschewing needles and covering the hands of anyone who added lights or decorations with a thick layer of sap. The floor went from being spottily clean to a veritable war zone, buried in miles of (now sticky) unwrapped paper and ribbon. A fury of activity had exploded following an equally energetic breakfast, and now boxes lay overturned and empty before counters stacked high with dirty plates. Upon the raucous arrival of Mike and the gang (followed by a slightly-grumpy Steve) Joyce had cast all of them outside to play in the snow that had fallen, bundling them all up and telling them on no uncertain terms that they were *not* to go beyond sight of the cabin.

"What a holly jolly hurricane," Hopper stated, wading through the chaos with a bulging bag, indiscriminately scooping up discarded paper and scattered debris. A muted peace had settled into place upon the kids' leaving, and the two adults were now performing damage control in this rare moment of quiet. He cast a deceptively fond look at the horde of children currently tearing through his woods, a whirlwind of snowballs zooming across the yard. It appeared that Mike and El had teamed up against the rest, Mike working defense while El sent a mass of snow missiles firing at the rest of her friends; Steve, it seemed, had gotten roped into playing "referee", and stood in the middle of the fray barking out calls that were immediately ignored. He had also (and Jim thought it best just not to ask) somehow managed to become covered in tinsel and a

fashionably lopsided Santa hat.

"And wasn't it a fun hurricane?" Joyce asked from her post at the kitchen sink, dunking dishes rapid-fire into hot, soapy water. She rinsed as she washed, setting plates out to dry with a speed that Jim had long since decided exceeded that of a mere mortal. "I suppose," he growled, dropping his bulging bag to the ground with a soft 'thud'.

Joyce laughed, then let out a soft shout of triumph. "Finally," she exclaimed, setting aside the final dish and pulling the stopper out of the soapy sink with relish. She dried her hands on the dishtowel before crossing the room to join Hopper in the middle of the ground zero that was his living room.

He watched her flick a quick look out at the kids, bottom lip drawn between her teeth, picking through Max and Mike and a laughing El (laughing—that child had come such a long way in such a short time) to make sure Will was still there, that Will, cheeks pink from cold and eyes bright, hadn't been drawn back to the nightmarish world of a few months ago. Reassured by his presence, she turned back to her companion, tucking a hank of brown hair behind her ear. "Well, Hop, I think we pulled it off."

He idly toed the bag he had set aside and then turned to her with a serious expression. "I think you pulled it off, Joyce. I had some half-assed plan to give the kid some kind of Christmas celebration, but it's been so long since I've had a reason to care about the holiday that it wasn't going to be worth shit." He put his hands in his pockets, shrugging his shoulders up to his ears and dropping them with a sigh, eyes cast over to the window so as to avoid her knowing gaze. "You gave her one hell of a day," he finally said gruffly, the unspoken 'thank you' hanging between them.

Joyce smiled, teeth flashing in what Hopper thought might have been the first true smile he had seen from her in months. "Thanks, Jim," she said, wrapping her hands around one large wrist and forcing his fist from his pocket, slipping one hand between his fingers and curling the other around his white knuckles.

"We've had one hell of a year," she said quietly, fingers tracing patterns on the back of the hand she held. It was an understatement,

miles away from being able to express the true horrors and realities that they had faced, but they had both already lived it—for each word she uttered, there were ten more sitting behind it, unuttered.

Their eyes locked, the tension in the air wound tighter than a coiled spring. It had been there for years, sitting unaddressed as they passed from high school to marriage to divorce and beyond. The last two years alone had been more stress than any single person should ever have to bear, and the time had never been right to seize this invisible thing and make it something more.

Now, though—now, it was Christmas, the Upside Down locked away once more, and it was just Joyce and Jim standing alone in his small cabin watching flecks of snow spiral down through the small window. No monsters, no missing children—nothing in the way.

It was Hopper who finally cracked.

"Fuck," he croaked, breaking eye contact with a reflexive jerk of his head, "I can't pretend anymore." He crushed her to him in a sudden move, their joined hands wedged awkwardly between their bodies. He left his one hand at her waist and freed the other, cupping her cheek with a tenderness that contradicted the fire burning in his eyes. He dipped his head, nose skimming her cheek, and then finally (*finally*) after months of torment spent watching her with Bob and then of the guilt associated *with* Bob—finally they were kissing.

Both his hands slid down to cradle her to him, tracing patterns on her back as her own small hands rose to fist in the flannel of his shirt. His mouth was rough against hers, seeking and devouring and claiming everything he had been subconsciously chasing for so very long.

Joyce returned the kiss with equal fervor, her eyes brimming with unvoiced emotions before they fluttered close, lashes kissing her cheeks as she sighed into his mouth. Finally, *finally* she was in his arms. Not just a kind hand on her arm, or an arm around her shoulder, but her *here*, clasped in a crushing embrace as he plundered her mouth. She gave a startled laugh as he swept her up and deposited her on the back of the couch, eliminating some of the distance between them, even as his mouth never left hers.

"Hop," she croaked, finally forced to break away to seize a most needed gasp of air, "Jim, the kids-

"Are outside," he said resolutely, looking utterly disheveled with his hair mussed and his shirt askew. "From the looks of that snowball war they will be occupied for a long time." He quirked an eyebrow. "Or, at least long enough for them to come trooping back inside covered in ice and mud and dripping all over my floor."

She laughed into his mouth as he brushed another series of kisses across her lips. "Look at you being all responsible," she teased. "We've come a long way since eleventh grade behind the bleachers."

His mouth moved from her lips to her cheek, ghosting kisses across her cheekbone and along the column of her neck down to the line of her sweater. She shivered as his beard scratched pleasantly against her skin, his lips teasing sensitive skin as he tugged the sweater down to follow the curve of her collarbone. When his tongue darted out to caress the tender flesh there, Joyce gasped and drew his head back up, skin pleasantly flushed and heart hammering in her chest.

"Jim, we *can't* do this here," she said, hands running through his hair, slipping down to the back of his neck to play with the soft strands there. She felt him shudder at her light touch. "I know," he finally conceded, leaning forward to rest his forehead against hers. "We'd just be asking for it with that one." His eyes were dark with promise as he met her burning gaze. "But later..." he added.

Joyce wrapped her arms around his broad chest, face tilted into his neck and lips caressing his skin as she spoke, "Later," she said resolutely, years of promise packed into that single word. He chuckled, a deep rumble in his chest that vibrated her slim frame, one big hand rising to smooth down her ruffled hair. "And after that?" he asked, his soft tone belying his apprehension.

"And after," she replied, catching his hand in hers and entwining their fingers, "forever."